

Dark Hollow

By Anna Katharine Green

Illustrations by C. D. Rhodes

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SYNOPSIS.

A curious crowd of neighbors invade the mysterious home of Judge Ostrander, county judge and eccentric recluse, following a valued woman who proves to be the widow of a man tried before the judge and electrocuted for murder years before. Her daughter is engaged to the judge's son, from whom he is estranged, but the murder is between the lovers. She plans to clear her husband's memory and asks the judge's aid. Deborah Scoville reads the newspaper clippings telling the story of the murder of Algernon Etheridge by John Scoville in Dark Hollow, twelve years before. The judge and Mrs. Scoville meet at Spencer's Folly and she shows him how, on the day of the murder, she saw the shadow of a man, wearing a stick and wearing a long peaked cap. The judge engages her and her daughter Reuther to live with him in his mysterious home. Deborah and her lawyer, Black, go to the police station and see the silk used to murder Etheridge. She discovers a broken knife-blade point embedded in it. Deborah and Reuther go to live with the judge. Deborah sees a portrait of Oliver, the judge's son, with a black band painted across the eyes. That night she finds in Oliver's room a cap with a black band painted across the eyes, and a knife with a broken blade-point. Anonymous letters and a talk with Miss Weeks increase her suspicions and fears. She finds that Oliver was in the ravine on the murder night.

CHAPTER X—Continued.

She had rather have died, nay, have had Reuther die, than to find herself forced to weigh and decide so momentous a question.

For, however she might feel about it, not a single illusion remained as to whose hand had made use of John Scoville's stick to strike down Algernon Etheridge. How could she have when she came to piece the whole story together, and weigh the facts she had accumulated against Oliver with those which had proved so fatal to her husband?

Deborah shuddered. Aye, the mystery had cleared, but only to enshroud her spirits anew and make her long with all her bursting heart and shuddering soul that death had been her portion before ever she had essayed to lift the veil held down so tightly by these two remorseful men.

But was her fault irremediable? The only unanswerable connection between this old crime and Oliver lay in the evidence she had herself collected. As she had every intention of suppressing this evidence, and as she had small dread of any one else digging out the facts to which she only possessed a clue, might she not hope that any suspicions raised by her inquiries would fall like a house of cards when she withdrew her hand from the toppling structure?

She would make her first effort and see. Mr. Black had heard her complaint; he should be the first to learn that the encouragement she had received was so small that she had decided to accept her present good luck without further query, and not hark back to a past which most people had buried.

"You began it, as women begin most things, without thought and a due weighing of consequences. And now you propose to drop it in the same freakish manner. Isn't that it?"

Deborah Scoville lifted her eyes in manifest distress and fixed them deprecatingly upon her interrogator.

Mr. Black smiled. The woman delighted him. The admiration which he had hitherto felt for her person and for the character which could so develop through misery and reproach as to make her in twelve short years the exponent of all that was most attractive and bewitching in woman seemed likely to extend to her mind.

"I am reconciled simply from necessity," was her gentle response. "Nothing is more precious to me than Reuther's happiness. I should but endanger it further by raising false hopes. That is why I have come to cry halt."

"Madam, I commend your decision. But why should you characterize your hopes as false, just when there seems to be some justification for them?"

Her eyes widened, and she regarded him with a simulation of surprise, which interested without imposing upon him.

"I do not understand you," said she. "Have you come upon some clue? Have you heard something which I have not?"

Mr. Black took two or three crushed and folded papers from a drawer beside him and, holding them, none too plainly in sight, remarked very quietly, but with legal firmness:

"Do not let us play about the bush any longer. You have announced your intention of making no further attempt to discover the man who in your eyes merited the doom accorded to John Scoville. Your only reason for this—if you are the woman I think you—lies in your fear of giving further opportunity to the misguided rancor of an irresponsible writer of anonymous epistles. Am I not right, madam?"

Breathless, beaten by a direct assault, because she possessed the weaknesses, as well as the pluck, of a woman. She could control the language of her lips, but not their quivering; she could meet his eye with steady assurance, but she could not keep the pallor from her cheeks or subdue the evidences of her heart's turmoil. Her pitiful glance

acknowledged her defeat, which she already saw mirrored in his eyes.

Taking it for an answer, he said gently enough:

"That we may understand each other at once, I will mention the person who has been made the subject of these attacks. He—"

"Don't speak the name," she prayed, leaning forward and laying her gloved hand upon his sleeve. "It is not necessary. The whole thing is an outrage."

His admiration was quite evident. It did not prevent him, however, from saying quite abruptly:

"Men who indulge themselves in writing anonymous accusations seldom limit themselves to one effusion. I will stake my word that the judge has found more than one on his lawn."

She could not have responded if she would; her mouth was dry, her tongue half paralyzed. What was coming? The glint in the lawyer's eye forewarned her that something scarcely in consonance with her hopes and wishes might be expected.

"The judge has seen and read these barefaced insinuations against his son and has not turned this whole town topsy-turvy! A lion does not stop to meditate; he springs. And Archibald Ostrander has the nature of a lion. Mrs. Scoville, this is a very serious matter. I do not wonder that you are a trifle overwhelmed by the results of your ill-considered investigations."

"Does the town know? Has the thing become a scandal—a byword? Miss Weeks gave no proof of ever having heard one word of this dreadful business."

"That is good news. You relieve me. Perhaps it is not a general topic as yet." Then shortly and with lawyerlike directness:

"Look over these. Do they look at all familiar?"

She glanced down at the crumpled sheets and half-sheets he had spread out before her. They were stellar in appearance to the one she had picked up on the judge's grounds, but the language was more forcible, as witness these:

When a man is trusted to defend another on trial for his life, he is supposed to know his business. How came John Scoville to hang, without a thought being given to the man who hated A. Etheridge like poison? I could name a certain class who more than once in the old days boasted that he'd like to kill the fellow. And it wasn't Scoville or any one of his low-down stamp either.

A high and mighty name shouldn't shield a man who sent a poor, unfriended wretch to his death in order to save his own bacon.

"Horrible!" murmured Deborah, drawing back in terror of her own emotion. "It's the work of some implacable enemy taking advantage of the situation I have created. Mr. Black, this man must be found and made to see that no one will believe, not even Scoville's widow—"

"There! you needn't go any further with that," admonished the lawyer. "Have you any idea who this person is?"

"Not the least in the world."

"I ask because of this," he explained, picking out another letter and smilingly holding it out toward her. She read it with flushed cheeks.

Listen to the lady. You can't listen to any one nicer. What she wants she can get. There's a witness you never saw or heard of.

A witness they had never heard of! What witness? Scarcely could she lift up her eyes from the paper. Yet there was a possibility, of course, that this statement was a lie.

"Stuff, isn't it?" muttered the lawyer. "Never mind, we'll soon have hold of the writer." His face had taken on a much more serious aspect, and she could no longer complain of his indifference or even of his sarcasm.

"You will give me another opportunity of talking with you on this matter," pursued he. "If you do not come here you may expect to see me at Judge Ostrander's. I do not quite like the position into which you have been thrown by these absurd insinuations. It may even lead to your losing the home which has been so fortunately opened for you. If this occurs you may count on my friendship, Mrs. Scoville. I may have failed you once, but I will not fail you twice."

Surprised, almost touched, she held out her hand, with a cordial "Thank you," in which emotion struggled with her desire to preserve an appearance of complete confidence in Judge Ostrander, and incidentally in his son. Then she turned to go.

The lawyer appeared to acquiesce in the movement of departure. But when he saw her about to vanish through the door some impulse of compunction, as real as it was surprising, led him to call her back and seat her once more in the chair she had so lately left.

"I cannot let you go," said he, "until you understand that these insinuations from a self-called witness would not be worth our attention if there were not a few facts to give color to his wild claims. Oliver Ostrander

was in that ravine connecting with Dark Hollow, very near the time of the onslaught on Mr. Etheridge; and he certainly hated the man and wanted him out of the way. The whole town knows that, with one exception. You know that exception?"

"I think so," she acceded, taking a fresh grip upon her emotions.

"That this was anything more than a coincidence has never been questioned. He was not even summoned as a witness. With the judge's high reputation in mind I do not think a single person could have been found in those days to suggest any possible connection between this boy and a crime so obviously premeditated. But people's minds change with time and events, and Oliver Ostrander's name uttered in this connection today would not occasion the same shock to the community as it would have done then. You understand me, Mrs. Scoville?"

"You allude to the unexpected separation between himself and father, and not to any failure on his part to sustain the reputation of his family?"

"Oh, he has made a good position for himself, and earned universal consideration. But that doesn't weigh against the prejudices of people, roused by such eccentricities as have distinguished the conduct of these two men."

"Alas!" she murmured, frightened to the soul for the first time, both by his manner and his words.

"You know and I know," he went on with a grimness possibly suggested by his subject, "that no mere whim lies back of such a preposterous accusation as that of Judge Ostrander being his double fence. Sons do not cut loose from fathers or fathers from sons without good cause. You can see, then, that the peculiarities of their mutual history form but a poor foundation for any light refutation of this scandal, should it reach the public mind. Judge Ostrander knows this, and you know that he knows this; hence your distress. Have I not read your mind, madam?"

"No one can read my mind any more than they can read Judge Ostrander's," she avowed in a last desperate attempt to preserve her secret. "You may think you have done so, but what assurance can you have of the fact?"

"You are strong in their defense," said he, "and you will need to be if the matter ever comes up. The shadows from Dark Hollow reach far, and engulf all they fall upon."

CHAPTER XI.

Changes.

"Reuther, sit up here close by mother and let me talk to you for a little while."

"Yes, mother; yes, mother," Deborah felt the beloved head pressed close to her shoulder and two soft arms fall about her neck.

"Are you very unhappy? Is my little one pining too much for the old days?"

A closer pressure of the head, a more vehement clasp of the encircling arms, but no words.

They were sitting in the dark, with just the light of the stars shining through the upper panes of the one unshaded window. Deborah, therefore, had little to fear from her daughter's eye, only from the sensitiveness of her touch and the quickness of her ear. Alas, in this delicately organized girl these were both attuned to the nicest discrimination, and before the mother could speak Reuther had started up, crying:

"Oh, how your heart beats! Something has happened, darling mother; something which—"

"Hush, Reuther; it is only this: When I came to Shelby it was with a hope that I might some day smooth the way to your happiness. But it was only a wild dream, Reuther; and the hour has come for me to tell you so. What joys are left us must come in other ways; love unblest must be put aside resolutely and forever."

She felt the shudder pass through the slender form which had thrown itself again at her side; but when the young girl spoke it was with unexpected bravery and calm.

"I have long ago done that, mamma. I've had no hopes from the first. The look with which Oliver accepted my refusal to go on with the ceremony was one of gratitude, mother. I can never forget that. Relief struggled with grief. Would you have me cherish any further illusion after that?"

"Then you will not think me unkind or even untender if I say that every loving thought you give now to Oliver is hurtful both to yourself and to me. Don't indulge in them, my darling. Put your heart into work or into music, and your mother will bless you. Won't it help you to know this, Reuther? Your mother, who has had griefs, will bless you."

"Mother, mother!" The next morning found Deborah pale—almost as pale as Reuther. Knowing its cause herself, she did not invite the judge's inquiries; and another day passed. With the following morning she felt strong enough to open the conversation which had now become necessary for her peace of mind.

She waited till the moment when, her work all done, she was about to leave his presence. Pausing till she caught his eye, which seemed a little loath, she thought, to look her way, she observed, with perhaps unnecessary distinctness:

"I hope everything is to your mind, Judge Ostrander. I should be very sorry not to make you as comfortable as is possible under the circumstances."

Roused a little suddenly, perhaps, from thoughts quite disconnected with those of material comfort, he nodded

with the abstraction of one who recognizes that some sort of acknowledgment is expected from him; then, seeing her still waiting, added politely: "I am very well looked after, if that is what you mean, Mrs. Scoville. Bela could not do any better—if he ever did as well."

"I am glad," she replied, thinking with what humor this would have struck her once. "I—I ask because, having nothing on my mind but house-keeping, I desire to remedy anything which is not in accordance with your exact wishes."

His attention was caught and by the very phrase she desired.

"Nothing on your mind but house-keeping?" he repeated. "I thought you had something else of a very par-



She Held Out Her Hand With a Cordial "Thank You."

ticular nature with which to occupy yourself."

"I had; but I have been advised against pursuing it. The folly was too great."

"Who advised you?"

The words came short and sharp, just as they must have come in those old days when he confronted his antagonists at the bar.

"Mr. Black. He was my husband's counsel, you remember. He says that I should only have my trouble for my pains, and I have come to agree with him. Reuther must content herself with the happiness of living under this roof, and I, with hope of contributing to your comfort."

(TO BE CONTINUED)

THIS CHICKEN WELL DRESSED

Idaho Biddy Has a Full-Dress Flannel Coat and Seams to Be Proud of It.

The proudest chicken in Boise lives on West State street.

The bird has no medals for pedigree, no certificates for being a champion layer, no diplomas for good behavior, or unusual size. Yet without any of these attainments, this fowl is the observed of all observers. Citizens go blocks out of their way to see the bird, which struts with pride before their view.

This fowl claims the distinction of being the only bird in Boise to possess a swallow-tail overcoat. Its owner takes a personal interest in all her hens, and it was with some concern that she noticed during the summer that one of the late spring chickens failed to develop any feathers on its back.

When the cool evenings came on last fall the bird seemed to feel the cold, and its owner made from an old flannel shirt a unique coat, modeled after a full-dress coat, with a front to speak of, but plenty of back and tail. Slits were arranged for the bird's wings, and the fowl seems to others in the coop to be particularly proud of the costume.

No Profit in Irish Sugar Beets.

While sugar beets can be successfully grown in Ireland, writes Consul Wesley Frost, from Queenstown, their culture would probably not be profitable, according to a statement just issued by the head of the department of agriculture and technical instruction for Ireland. The fact has been established that a normal price for sugar beets will yield less per acre than the normal prices for potatoes or mangels. As the sugar beet industry would not be successful under the ordinary conditions of peace, the department does not feel "prepared to take, directly or indirectly, any responsibility for advising Irish farmers to grow beet root." It is added that whatever may be the results of England's exclusion of sugar, therefore, in Scotland and England, it seems safe to assume that sugar production will not be developed in Ireland.—New York Times.

Church Tithes.

There is no sum voted for the Church of England in the annual Budget of Great Britain. The church derives most of her income from tithes. These were gifts made to the church by her children, who could not give the whole, but willed a portion of their property or income to her for ever. The government permitted the collection of these tithes, which gave effect to the will by granting them.

LITTLE GOOD IN FREE BATHS

City Controller of New York Goes on Record as Opposing Increase in Their Number.

City Controller Prendergast of New York opposes increasing free public baths, strangely enough for a former progressive leader. He is not one bit impressed by the argument that baths prevent lawlessness and raise the standard of morals. "I doubt," he says, "if morals are as high today generally as they were twenty years ago, before the community had any of these uplifting facilities." Replying to a question about cleanliness being next to godliness, he said that all that was necessary was soap and water and the inclination, particularly the last, which the city, he thought, could not hope to furnish.

Yet the civilizing influence of soap is traditional. The bathtub has been exalted into a national ideal in England and a national reality in the United States. The backward peoples have no baths. Physical cleanliness must inspire moral and mental cleanliness, not infallibly, perhaps, but the tendency, such as it may be, is that way. As to the inclination, may not the city supply even that by offering the temptation of bathing?

Aside from the question of morals, how about health? Surely the controller will admit that cleanliness improves health and that is certainly a function that the municipal government ought to be interested in.

Shocking and Inexcusable Waste.

"The plaintiff in a recent suit for divorce," related the scribe, "declared that he awoke in the night to find his bed soaked with alcohol and his wife hunting for a match!"

"Arr-r-r!" grumbled Deleary M. Trimmings, "that was a heck of a way to waste alcohol, wasn't it?"—Kansas City Star.

Encore.

"I'm glad we didn't get any duplicates," said the bride as they inspected the wedding gifts.

"I wouldn't mind if somebody would duplicate that check your father gave us," replied the bridegroom.

Estimating the Probabilities.

"My daughter is having her voice trained," said Mr. Cumrox. "Is she a soprano or a contralto?"

"I dunno. I suppose she'll decide to be which ever costs the most."

WAVES HIGH UP IN RANK

Sufferer From Effects of High Sea Was Designating Them as He Watched Their Approach.

A New York man was crossing the Atlantic with an army officer who suffered greatly from seasickness.

On entering the stateroom one particularly rough day he found the officer tossing in his berth, muttering in what at first appeared to be a sort of delirium.

Stooping over to catch his words, the friend heard him say: "Sergeant . . . major . . . sergeant . . . major . . . brigadier general . . . ugh, lieutenant general . . . a-a-a-h!"

"What are you saying?" asked the friend in some alarm, as the sufferer looked pitiously up at him after his last gasping "a-a-h!"

"Assigning the waves their rank," said the military man, rolling toward the wall again. "There have been eight lieutenant generals within the last twenty minutes."

His Excuse.

In his Savannah camp Bill Donovan, baseball manager, had a dusky hued waiter at the hotel by the name of Sutton. Bill had to reproach Sutton more than once for a lack of agility in arriving with the food. Sutton promised to improve. One morning he brought in a consignment of grid-dicakes that had gone cold.

"What do you mean," said Bill, "by bringing me in cold cakes?"

"Well, I tell you, boss," said Sutton, "I brung them cakes in so fast for you that I guess they hit a draft."

Sad Part of the Allegation.

"Every darn fool in this town thinks he could run a newspaper better than I can!" grumbled the editor of the Torpville Tocsin and Guardian of the Heartstone, the price whereof was a dollar a year and the time to subscribe now.

"Ky-yah!" replied Mortimer Morose. "And the worse of it is, a good many of 'em could!"—Kansas City Star.

Did Not Hate Him That Bad.

"I was telling Titewad this morning that shells for a 12-inch gun cost \$500 each."

"Well, what about it?"

"He said he wouldn't shoot one of those shells at his worst enemy."

Heroes have to wade through a job lot of trouble to get a reputation.